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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 002101

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: SPAIN-SYRIA: ASAD VISIT TO MADRID

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathleen M. Fitzpatrick for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Spanish MFA Political Director Dezcallar told us that Syrian President Asad during his June 1-2 visit to Madrid indicated he was fully willing to "go all the way<sup>8</sup> with Israel to achieve peace ) but on the basis of the return of all Syrian territory. However, the Syrians said that water and navigation rights related to Lake Tiberias were not important to them; Syria wanted the symbolic satisfaction of having all of its territory returned, according to Dezcallar. The GOS also found it significant that Asad had agreed to condemn "all forms of terrorism.<sup>8</sup> On WMD, Dezcallar said that the Syrians agreed to reinvigorate a Syria-Spain dialogue on the issue, and noted that both sides had called for a "weapons of mass destruction-free zone<sup>8</sup> in the Middle East. Dezcallar acknowledged that Asad gave nothing on securing the border with Iraq. He said that Asad praised Spain's new "positive image" in the Arab world since the Iraq troop withdrawal decision. He averred that Spain,s new role might be "useful" to the US with Syria or on other issues. End summary

2. (C) On the heels of visits to Madrid by Israeli FM Shalom and Palestinian PM Qorei, Syrian President Bashar Asad paid a visit to Spain to meet with King Juan Carlos (who paid a State visit to Syria in October, 2003), Spanish President Zapatero and FM Moratinos. The Spanish press gave extensive and favorable coverage to the visit, and Asad and Zapatero issued a joint communiqu in which they agreed to broaden and deepen Syrian-Spanish relations. The widely publicized communiqu states their agreement that peace in the Middle East could only be achieved through a "just and comprehensive" solution, and reaffirms the principles of the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference in October 1991 and relevant UNSC resolutions.

3. (C) The communiqu also states that both states condemn "all forms of terrorism," in particular the March 11 terrorist attacks in Madrid. Both sides vowed to renew their commitment to cooperate and contribute whatever efforts necessary to combat international terrorism under the auspices of the United Nations. Both governments expressed "solidarity with the Iraqi people<sup>8</sup> and their desire for return of full Iraqi sovereignty and independence. The communiqu also calls on the international community to work actively to achieve these objectives, with a central UN role in all of these efforts. The two sides also agreed to work toward making the Middle East a "Weapons of Mass Destruction free zone" and to maintain a "frank and constructive" dialogue on this issue. Spain also agreed to work to conclude an EU-Syria association agreement.

4. (C) We discussed the Asad visit with MFA Political Director Dezcallar on the margins of a discussion on the Iraq UNSCR (septel). When asked whether the Spanish government had pressed Asad on ending support for terrorism, Dezcallar said he and his colleagues found it significant that Asad had been willing to condemn "all forms of terrorism." He believes this can help open a "channel of dialogue" with the Syrians on this issue. Dezcallar noted Asad,s comment that Spain,s decision to withdraw its troops in Iraq had given Spain a new, more "positive" image in the Arab world. Spain is taking an active role in the region, given FM Moratinos, previous experience in the region as EU envoy, and Spain,s new lines of dialogue could be "useful" to the U.S., Dezcallar said.

5. (C) Asked whether Spain had pressed Asad on Weapons of Mass Destruction, Dezcallar said that Syria had agreed to renew a dialogue with Spain on the issue, and that this could also be helpful to us. He had no comment on the pledge of support for a "Weapons of Mass Destruction-free zone" in the Middle East. (There was no reference to Israeli nuclear issues.)

6. (C) On the Iraq-Syria border, Dezcallar admitted that Asad had addressed this issue only in general terms, and had refused to acknowledge Syria,s own complicity in this area. While Zapatero had publicly accepted Asad,s invitation to visit Syria, Dezcallar downplayed this, saying that no dates had been set and that "we shall see" when such a visit could take place.

17. (C) Dezcallar highlighted Asad,s comments to his Spanish interlocutors on the Middle East peace process and relations with Israel. Dezcallar said Asad indicated Syria was willing to "go all the way" with Israel to make peace, but on the basis of return of all of Syrian occupied territory. Dezcallar insisted that the Syrians gave a "clear message" that they want peace, and were willing to forego water and navigation rights over Lake Tiberias as long as the 200 kilometers of shoreline is returned to Syria. What is important for Syria, Dezcallar said, is the symbolic significance of the return of all of its territory.

18. (C) Comment: This has been an extremely busy "Middle East8 period for the new Spanish government, with visits in the last two weeks by Israeli FM Shalom, Palestinian PM Qorei, Assistant Secretary of State Bill Burns, as well as visits to the region and North Africa by MFA Deputy Foreign Minister Bernardino Leon. Clearly the new government wants to be a player on Middle East issues and believes, correctly or not, that its Iraq decision has provided new found "respect8 for Spain in the Arab/Muslim world. Further, Moratinos will continue to remain active in his old EU portfolio. It will be important for the USG to maintain close contact with our Spanish interlocutors on Middle East issues, in the hope of trying to avoid unhelpful messages or signals.

ARGYROS